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ATHALIA HAD A FANCY, IN THE WARM TWILIGHT, FOR WALKING DOWN LONELY LAKE ROAD

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The Way to Peace

BY

MARGARET DELAND

ILLUSTRATED BY

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LORIN DELAND

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Illustrations

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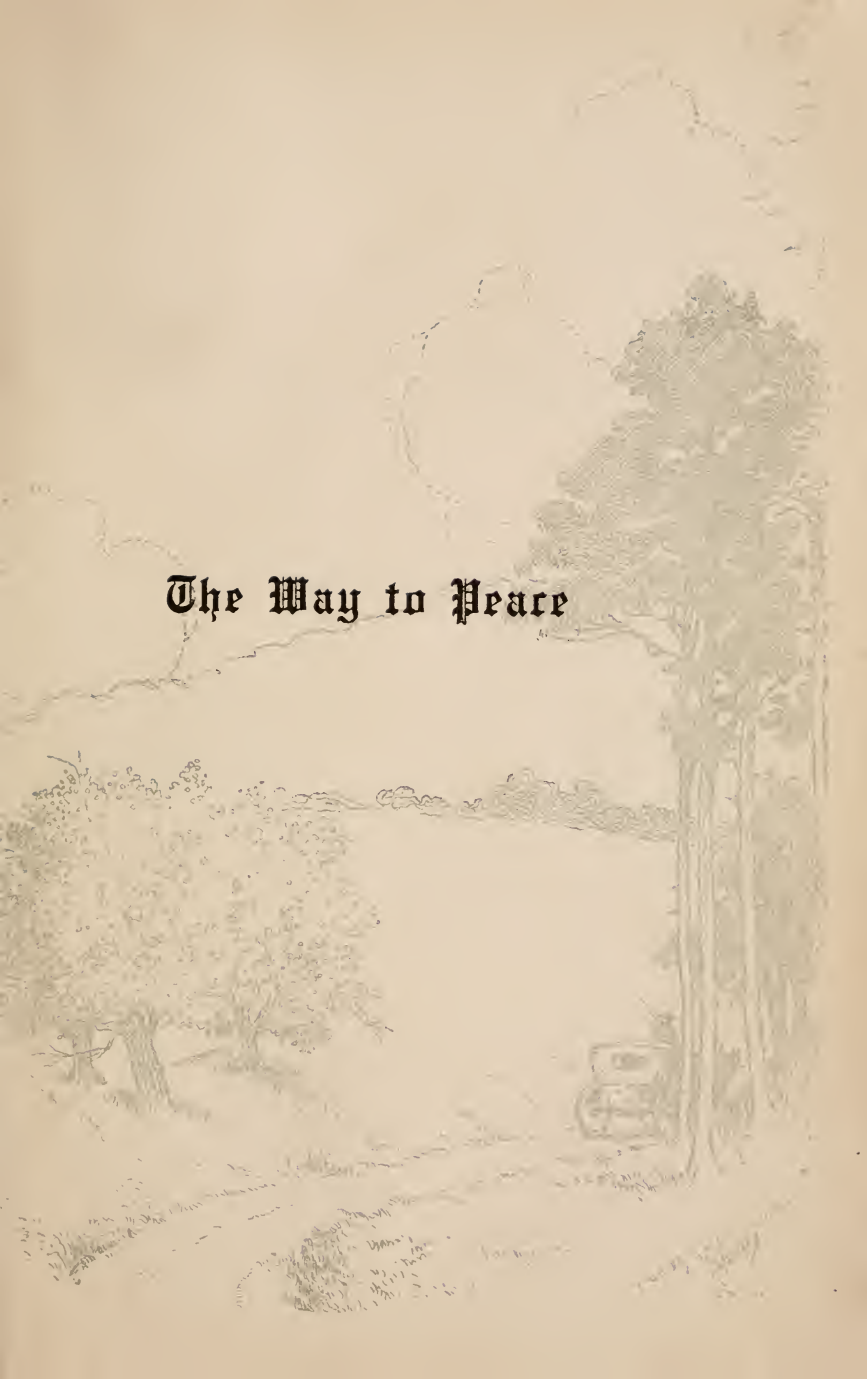


The Way to Peace

The Way to Peace

I

ATHALIA HALL stopped to get her breath and look back over the road climbing steeply up from the covered bridge. It was a little after five, and the delicate air of dawn was full of wood and pasture scents—the sweetness of bay and the freshness of dew-drenched leaves. In the valley night still hung like gauze under the trees, but the top of the hill was glittering with sunshine.

"Why, we've hardly come halfway!" she said.

Her husband, plodding along behind

her, nodded ruefully. "Hardly," he said.

In her slim prettiness Athalia Hall looked like a girl, but she was thirty-four. Part of the girlishness lay in the smoothness of her white forehead and in the sincere intensity of her gaze. She wore a blue linen dress, and there was a little, soft, blue scarf under her chin; her white hat, with pink roses and loops of gray-blue ribbon, shadowed eager, unhumorous eyes, the color of forget-me-nots. Her husband was her senior by several years—a large, loose-limbed man, with a scholarly face and mild, calm eyes—eyes that were full of a singular tenacity of purpose. Just now his face showed the fatigue of the long climb up-hill; and when his wife, stopping to look back over the glistening tops of the birches, said, "I believe it's half a

mile to the top yet!" he agreed, breathlessly. "Hard work!" he said.

"It will be worth it when I get to the top and can see the view!" she declared, and began to climb again.

"All the same, this road will be mighty hot when the sun gets full on it," her husband said; and added, anxiously, "I wish I had made you rest in the station until train-time."

She flung out her hands with an exclamation: "Rest! I hate rest!"

"Hold on, and I'll give you a stick," he called to her; "it's a help when you're climbing." He pulled down a slender birch, and, setting his foot on it, broke it off at the root. She stopped, with an impatient gesture, and waited while he tore off handfuls of leaves and whittled away the side-shoots.

"Do hurry, Lewis!" she said.

The Way to Peace

They had left their train at five o'clock in the morning, and had been sitting in the frowsy station, sleepily awaiting the express, when Athalia had had this fancy for climbing the hill so that she might see the view.

"It looks pretty steep," her husband warned her.

"It will be something to do, anyhow!" she said; and added, with a restless sigh, "but you don't understand that, I suppose."

"I guess I do—after a fashion," he said, smiling at her. It was only in love's fashion, for really he was incapable of quite understanding her. To the country lawyer of sober piety and granite sense of duty, the rich variety of her moods was a continual wonder and sometimes a painful bewilderment. But whether he understood the impetuous inconsequence of her temperament

"after a fashion," or whether he failed entirely to follow the complexity of her thought, he met all her fancies with a sort of tender admiration. People said that Squire Hall was henpecked; they also said that he had married beneath him. His father had been a judge and his grandfather a minister; he himself was a graduate of a fresh-water college, which later, when he published his exegesis on the Prophet Daniel, had conferred its little degree upon him and felt that he was a "distinguished son." With such a lineage he might have done better, people said, than to marry that girl, who was the most fickle creature and no housekeeper, and whose people—this they told one another in reserved voices — were *play-actors!* Athalia's mother, who had been the "play-actor," had left her children an example of duty—

domestic as well as professional duty —faithfully done. As she did not leave anything else, Athalia added nothing to the Hall fortune; but Lewis's law practice, which was hardly more than conveyancing now and then, was helped out by a sawmill which the Halls had owned for two generations. So, as things were, they were able to live in humdrum prosperity which gave Lewis plenty of time to browse about among his grandfather's old theological books, and by-and-by to become a very sound Hebrew scholar, and spared Athalia much wholesome occupation which would have been steadying to her eager nature. She was one of those people who express every passing emotion, as a flower expresses each wind that sways it upon its stalk. But with expression the emotion ended.

"But she isn't fickle," Lewis had de-

fended her once to a privileged relation who had made the accusation, basing it on the fact that Athalia had sewed her fingers off for the Missionary Society one winter and done nothing the next—"Athalia *isn't* fickle," Lewis explained; "fickle people are insincere. Athalia is perfectly sincere, but she is temporary; that's all. Anyway, she wants to do something else this winter, and 'Thalia must have her head."

"Your head's better than hers, young man," the venturesome relative insisted.

"But it must be her head and not mine, Aunty, when it comes to doing what she thinks is right, even if it's wrong," he said, smiling.

"Well, tell her she's a little fool!" cried the old lady, viciously.

"You can't do that with 'Thalia,"

Lewis explained, patiently, "because it would make her unhappy. She takes everything so dreadfully hard; she feels things more than other people do."

"Lewis," said the little, old, wrinkled, privileged great-aunt, "think a little less of her feelings and a little more of your own, or you'll make a mess of things."

Lewis Hall was too respectful to tell the old lady what he thought of such selfish advice; he merely did not act upon it. Instead, he went on giving a great deal of thought to Athalia's "feelings." That was why he and she were climbing the hill in the dewy silence of this August morning. Athalia had "felt" that she wanted to see the view—though it would have been better for her to have rested in the station, Lewis thought;—("I ought to

have coaxed her out of it," he reproached himself.) It certainly was a hard walk, considering that it followed a broken night in the sleeping-car. They had left the train at five o'clock in the morning, and were sitting in the station awaiting the express when Athalia had had this impulse to climb the hill. "It looks pretty steep," Lewis objected; and she flung out her hands with an impatient gesture.

"I love to climb!" she said. So here they were, almost at the top, panting and toiling, Athalia's skirts wet with dew, and Lewis's face drawn with fatigue.

"Look!" she said; "it's all open! We can sit down and see all over the world!" She left the road, springing lightly through the fringing bay and briers toward an open space on the hillside. "There is a gate in the wall!"

she called out; "it seems to be some sort of enclosure. Lewis, help me to open the gate! Hurry! What a queer place! What do you suppose it is?"

The gate opened into a little field bounded by a stone wall; the grass had been lately mowed, and the stubble, glistening with dew, showed the curving swaths of the scythe; across it, in even lines from wall to wall, were rows of small stakes painted black. Here and there were faint depressions, low, green cradles in the grass; each depression was marked at the head and foot by these iron stakes, hardly higher than the stubble itself.

"Shakers' graveyard, I guess," Lewis said; "I've heard that they don't use gravestones. Peaceful place, isn't it?"

Her vivid face was instantly grave. "Very peaceful! Oh," she added, as they sat down in the shadow of a pine,

A PEACEFUL PLACE

"don't you sometimes want to lie down and sleep—deep down in the grass and flowers?"

"Well," he confessed, "I don't believe it would be as interesting as walking round on top of them."

She looked at him in despair.

"Come, now," he defended himself, "you don't take much to peace yourself at home."

"You don't understand!" she said, passionately.

"There, there, little Tay," he said, smiling, and putting a soothing hand on hers; "I guess I do—after a fashion."

It was very still; below them the valley had suddenly brimmed with sunshine that flickered and twinkled on the birch leaves or shimmered on sombre stretches of pine and spruce. Close at hand, pennyroyal grew thick in the shadow of the wall; and just be-

yond, mullen candles cast slender bars of shade across the grass. The sunken graves and the lines of iron markers lay before them.

"How quiet it is!" she said, in a whisper.

"I guess I'll smoke," Lewis said, and scratched a match on his trousers.

"How can you!" she protested; "it is profane!"

He gave her an amused look, but lighted his cigar and smoked dreamily for a minute; then he drew a long breath. "I was pretty tired," he said, and turned to glance back at the road. A horse and cart were coming in at the open gate; the elderly driver, singing to himself, drew up abruptly at the sight of the two under the pine-tree, then drove toward them, the wheels of the cart jolting cheerfully over the cradling graves. He had a sickle in his

hand, and as he clambered down from the seat, he said, with friendly curiosity:

"You folks are out early, for the world's people."

"Is this a graveyard?" Athalia demanded, impetuously.

"Yee," he said, smiling; "it's our burial-place; we're Shakers."

"But why are there just the stakes —without names?"

"Why should there be names?" he said, whimsically; "they have new names now."

"Where is your community? Can we go and visit it?"

"Yee; but we're not much to see," he said; "just men and women, like you. Only we're happy. I guess that's all the difference."

"But what a difference!" she exclaimed; and Lewis smiled.

"I've come up for pennyroyal," the

Shaker explained, sociably; "it grows thick round here."

"Tell me about the Shakers," Athalia pleaded. "What do you believe?"

"Well," he said, a simple shrewdness glimmering in his brown eyes, "if you go to the Trustees' House, down there in the valley, Eldress Hannah 'll tell you all about us. And the sisters have baskets and pretty truck to sell—things the world's people like. Go and ask the Eldress what we believe, and she'll show you the baskets."

She turned eagerly to her husband. "Never mind the ten-o'clock train, Lewis. Let us go!"

"We could take a later train, all right," he admitted, "but—"

"Oh, *please!*" she entreated, joyously. "We'll help you pick pennyroyal," she added to the Shaker.

But this he would not allow. "I

doubt you'd be careful enough," he said, mildly; "Sister Lydia was the only female I ever knew who could pick herbs."

"Do you get paid for the work you do?" Athalia asked, practically. Lewis flushed at the boldness of such a question, but the old man chuckled.

"Should I pay myself?" he asked.

"You own everything in common, don't you?" Lewis said.

"Yee," said the Shaker; "we're all brothers and sisters. Nobody tries to get ahead of anybody else."

"And you don't believe in marriage?" Athalia asserted.

"We are as the angels of God," he said, simply.

He left them and began to sickle his herbs, with the cheerfully obvious purpose of escaping further interruption.

Athalia instantly bubbled over with

questions, but Lewis could tell her hardly more of the Shakers than she knew already.

"No, it isn't free love," he said; "they're decent enough. They believe in general love, not particular, I suppose. . . . 'Thalia, do you think it's worth while to wait over a train just to see the settlement?"

"Of course it is! He said they were happy; I would like to see what kind of life makes people happy."

He looked at the lighted end of his cigar and smiled, but he said nothing. Afterward, as they followed the cart across the field and out into the road, Athalia asked the old herb-gatherer many questions about the happiness of the community life, which he answered patiently enough. Once or twice he tried to draw into their talk the silent husband who walked at her side, but

Lewis had nothing to say. Only when some reference was made to one of the Prophecies did he look up in sudden interest. "You take that to mean the Judgment, do you?" he said. And for the rest of the walk to the settlement the two men discussed the point, the Shaker walking with one hand on the heavy shaft, for the support it gave him, and Lewis keeping step with him.

At the foot of the hill the road widened into a grassy street, on both sides of which, under the elms and maples, were the community houses, big and substantial, but gauntly plain; their yellow paint, flaking and peeling here and there, shone clean and fresh in the sparkle of morning. Except for a black cat whose fur glistened like jet, dozing on a white doorstep, the settlement, steeped in sunshine, showed no

sign of life. There was a strange remoteness from time about the place; a sort of emptiness, and a silence that silenced even Athalia.

"Where *is* everybody?" she said, in a lowered voice; as she spoke, a child in a blue apron came from an open doorway and tugged a basket across the street.

"Are there children here?" Lewis asked, surprised; and their guide said, sadly:

"Not as many as there ought to be. The new school laws have made a great difference. We've only got two. Folks used to send 'em to us to bring up; oftentimes they stayed on after they were of age. Sister Lydia came that way. Well, well, she tired of us, Lydy did, poor girl! She went back into the world twenty years ago, now. And Sister Jane, she was a bound-out child,

too," he rambled on; "she came here when she was six; she's seventy now."

"What!" Lewis exclaimed; "has she never known anything but—this?"

His shocked tone did not disturb the old man. "Want to see my herb-house?" he said. "Guess you'll find some of the sisters in the sorting-room. I'm Nathan Dale," he added, courteously.

They had come to the open door of a great, weather-beaten building, from whose open windows an aromatic breath wandered out into the summer air. As they crossed the worn threshold, Athalia stopped and caught her breath in the overpowering scent of drying herbs; then they followed Brother Nathan up a shaky flight of steps to the loft. Here some elderly women, sitting on low benches, were sorting over great piles of herbs in

silence — the silence, apparently, of peace and meditation. Two of them were dressed like world's people, but the others wore small gray shoulder-capes buttoned to their chins, and little caps of white net stretched smoothly over wire frames; the narrow shirrings inside the frames fitted so close to their peaceful, wrinkled foreheads that no hair could be seen.

"I wish I could sit and sort herbs!" Athalia said, under her breath.

Brother Nathan chuckled. "For how long?" he asked; and then introduced her to the three workers, who greeted her calmly and went on sorting their herbs. The loft was dark and cool; the window-frames, in which there were no sashes, opened wide on the still August fields and woods; the occasional brief words of the sorting-women seemed to drop into a pool of

SORTING OVER GREAT PILES OF HERBS

IN THE SILENCE, APPARENTLY OF PEACE AND MEDITATION

fragrant silence. The two visitors followed Brother Nathan down the room between piles of sorted herbs, and out into the sunshine again. Athalia drew a breath of ecstasy.

"It's all so beautifully tranquil!" she whispered, looking about her with blue, excited eyes.

"Tay and tranquillity!" Lewis said, with an amused laugh.

But as they went along the grassy street this sense of tranquillity closed about them like a palpable peace. Now and then they stopped and spoke to some one—always an elderly person; and in each old face the experiences that life writes in unerasable lines about eyes and lips were hidden by a veil of calmness that was curiously unhuman.

"It isn't canny, exactly," Lewis told his wife, in a low voice. But she did

not seem to hear him. She asked many questions of Eldress Hannah, who had taken them in charge, and once or twice she burst into impetuous appreciation of the idea of brotherhood, and even of certain theological principles — which last diverted her husband very much. Eldress Hannah showed them the dairy, and the work-room, and all there was to see, with a patient hospitality that kept them at an infinite distance. She answered Lewis's questions about the community with a sad directness.

"Yee; there are not many of us now. The world's people say we're dying out. But the Lord will preserve the remnant to redeem the world, young man. Yee; when they come in from the world they cast their possessions into the whole; we own nothing, for ourselves. Nay; we don't have many come. Brother

William was the last. Why did he come?" She looked coldly at Athalia, who had asked the question. "Because he saw the way to peace. He'd had strife enough in the world. Yee," she admitted, briefly, "some fall from grace, and leave us. The last was Lydia. She was one of our children, and I thought she was of the chosen. But she was only thirty when she fell away, and you can't expect wisdom at that age. That was nearly twenty years ago. When she has tasted the dregs of the world she will come back to us—if she lives," Eldress Hannah ended.

Athalia listened breathlessly, her rapt, unhumorous eyes fixed on Eldress Hannah's still face. Now and then she asked a question, and once cried out that, after all, why wasn't it the way to live? Peace and self-sacrifice

and love! "Oh," she said, turning to her husband, "can't you feel the attraction of it? I should think even you could feel it!"

"I think I feel it—after a fashion," he said, mildly; "I think I have always felt the attraction of community life."

Afterward, when they had left all this somnolent peace and begun the long walk back to the station, he explained what he meant: "I couldn't say so before the Eldress, but of course there are times when anybody can feel the charm of getting rid of personal responsibility — and that is what community life really means. It's the relief of being a little cog in a big machine; in fact, the very attraction of it is a sort of temptation, to my way of looking at it. But it—well, it made me sleepy," he confessed.

For once his wife had no reply. She

was very quiet on that return journey in the cars, and in the days that followed she kept referring to their visit with a persistence that surprised her husband. She thought the net caps were beautiful; she thought the exquisite cleanness of everything was like a perfume—"the perfume of a wild rose!" she said, ecstatically. She thought the having everything in common was the way to live. "And just think how peaceful it is!"

"Well, yes," Lewis said; "I suppose it's peaceful—after a fashion. Anything that isn't alive is peaceful."

"But their idea of brotherhood is the highest kind of life!"

"The only fault I have to find with it is that it isn't human," he said, mildly. He had no desire to prove or disprove anything; Athalia was looking better, just because she was in-

terested in something, and that was enough for Lewis. When she proposed to read a book on Shakerism aloud, he fell into her mood with what was, for him, enthusiasm; he declared he would like nothing better, and he put his daily paper aside without a visible regret.

"Well," he admitted, "I must say there's more to it than I supposed. They've studied the Prophecies; that's evident. And they're not narrow in their belief. They're really Unitarians."

"Narrow?" she said—"they are as wide as heaven itself! And, oh, the peace of it!"

"But they are *not* human," he would insist, smiling; "no marriage—that's not human, little Tay."

It was not until two months later that he began to feel vaguely uneasy.

"Yes; it's interesting," he admitted; "but nobody in these days would want to be a Shaker." To which she replied, boldly, "Why not?"

That was all, but it was enough. Lewis Hall's face suddenly sobered. He had not stumbled along behind her in all her emotional experiences without learning to read the guide-posts to her thought. "I hope she'll get through with it soon," he said to himself, with a worried frown; "it isn't wholesome for a mind like 'Thalia's to dwell on this kind of thing."

It was in November that she broke to him that she had written Eldress Hannah to ask if she might come and visit the community, and had been answered "Yee."

Lewis was silent with consternation; he went out to the sawmill and climbed up into the loft to think it all out

alone. Should he forbid it? He knew that was nonsense; in the first place, his conception of the relation of husband and wife did not include that kind of thing; but more than that, opposition would, he said to himself, "push her in." Not into Shakerism; "'Thalia couldn't be a Shaker to save her life," he thought, with an involuntary smile; but into an excited discontent with her comfortable, prosaic life. No; definite opposition to the visit must not be thought of—but he must try and persuade her not to go. How? What plea could he offer? His own loneliness without her he could not bring himself to speak of; he shrank from taking what seemed to him an advantage. He might urge that she would find it cold and uncomfortable in those old frame houses high up on the hills; or that it would be bad for her health

to take the rather wearing journey at this time of year. But he knew too well how little effect any such prudent counsels would have. The very fact that her interest had lasted for more than three months showed that it had really struck roots into her mind, and mere prudence would not avail much. Still, he would urge prudence; then, if she was determined, she must go. "She'll get sick of it in a fortnight," he said; but for the present he must let her have her head, even if she was making a mistake. She had a right to have her head, he reminded himself—"but I must tell those people to keep her warm, she takes cold so easily."

He got up and looked out of the window; below, in the race, there was a jam of logs, and the air was keen with the pungent smell of sawdust and new boards. The whir and thud of the

machinery down-stairs sent a faint quiver through the planks under his feet. "The mill will net a good profit this year," he said to himself, absently. "'Thalia can have pretty nearly anything she wants." And even as he said it he had a sudden, vague misgiving: if she didn't have everything she wanted, perhaps she would be happier? But the idea was too new and too subtle to follow up, so the result of that troubled hour in the mill-chamber was only that he made no very resolute objection to Athalia's acceptance of Eldress Hannah's permission to come. It had been given grudgingly enough.

The family were gathered in the sitting-room; they had had their supper—the eight elderly women and the three elderly men, all that were left of

ALL THAT WERE LEFT OF THE COMMUNITY

the community. The room had the austere and shining cleanness which Athalia had called a perfume, but it was full of homely comfort. A blue-and-white rag carpet in the centre left a border of bare floor, painted pumpkin-yellow; there was a glittering air-tight stove with isinglass windows that shone like square, red eyes; a gay patchwork cushion in the seat of a rocking-chair was given up to the black cat, whose sleek fur glistened in the lamplight. Three of the sisters knitted silently; two others rocked back and forth, their tired, idle hands in their laps, their eyes closed; the other three yawned, and spoke occasionally between themselves of their various tasks. Brother Nathan read his weekly *Farmer;* Brother William turned over the leaves of a hymn-book and appeared to count them with noiseless,

moving lips; Brother George cut pictures out of the back of a magazine, yawning sometimes, and looking often at his watch. Into this quietness Eldress Hannah's still voice came:

"I have heard from Lydia again." There was a faint stir, but no one spoke. "The Lord is dealing with her," Eldress Hannah said; "she is in great misery."

Brother George nodded. "That is good; He works in a mysterious way —she's real miserable, is she? Well, well; that's good. The mercies of the Lord are everlasting," he ended, in a satisfied voice, and began to read again.

"Amen!—amen!" said Brother William, vaguely.

"Poor Lydy!" Brother Nathan murmured.

"And I had another letter," the Eldress proceeded, "from that young

woman who came here in August—Athalia Hall; do you remember?—she asked two questions to the minute! She wants to visit us."

Brother Nathan looked at her over his spectacles, and one of the sisters opened her eyes.

"I don't see why she should," Eldress Hannah added.

Two of the old brothers nodded agreement.

"The curiosity of the world's people does not help their souls," said one of the knitters.

"She thinks we walk in the Way to Peace," said the Eldress.

"Yee; we do," said Brother George.

"Shall I tell her 'nay'?" the Eldress questioned, calmly.

"Yee," said Brother George; and the dozing sisters murmured "Yee."

"Wait," said Brother Nathan; "her

husband—*he* has something to him. Let her come."

"But if she visited us, how would that affect him?" Eldress Hannah asked, surprised into faint animation.

"If she was moved to stay it would affect him," Brother Nathan said, dryly; "he would come, too, and there are very few of us left, Eldress. He would be a great gain."

There was a long silence. Brother William's gray head sagged on his shoulder, and the hymn-book slipped from his gnarled old hands. The knitting sisters began, one after another, to stab their needles into their balls of gray yarn and roll their work up in their aprons.

"It's getting late, Eldress," one of them said, and glanced at the clock.

"Then I'll tell her she may come?" said Eldress Hannah, reluctantly.

"He can make the wrath of man to praise Him," Brother Nathan encouraged her.

"Yee; but I never heard that He could make the foolishness of woman do it," the old woman said, grimly.

As the brothers and sisters parted at the door of the sitting-room Brother Nathan plucked at the Eldress's sleeve: "Is she very wretched — Lydia? Where is she now, Eldress? Poor Lydy! poor little Lydy!"

The fortnight of Athalia's absence wore greatly upon her husband. Apprehension lurked in the back of his mind. In the mill, or out on the farm, or when he sat down among his shabby, old, calf-skin books, he was assailed by the memory of all her various fancies during their married life. Some of

them were no more remarkable or unexpected than this interest in Shakerism. He began to be slowly frightened. Suppose she should take it into her head—?

When her fortnight was nearly up and he was already deciding whether, when he drove over to Depot Corners to meet her, he would take Ginny's colt or the new mare, a letter came to say she was going to stay a week longer.

"I believe," she wrote—her very pen, in the frantic down-hill slope of her lines, betraying the excitement of her thoughts—"I believe that for the first time in my life I have found my God!" The letter was full of dashes and underlining, and on the last page there was a blistered splash into which the ink had run a little on the edges.

Lewis Hall's heart contracted with an almost physical pang. "I must go

and get her right off," he said; "this thing is serious!" And yet, after a wakeful night, he decided, with the extraordinary respect for her individuality so characteristic of the man—a respect that may be called foolish or divine, as you happen to look at it—he decided not to go. If he dragged her away from the Shakers against her will, what would be gained? "I must give her her head, and let her see for herself that it's all moonshine," he told himself, painfully, over and over; "my seeing it won't accomplish anything." But he counted the hours until she would come home.

When she came, as soon as he saw her walking along the platform looking for him while he stood with his hand on Ginny's colt's bridle, even before she had spoken a single word, even then he knew what had happened — the

uplifted radiance of her face announced it.

But she did not tell him at once. On the drive home, in the dark December afternoon, he was tense with apprehension; once or twice he ventured some questions about the Shakers, but she put them aside with a curious gentleness, her voice a little distant and monotonous; her words seemed to come only from the surface of her mind. When he lifted her out of the sleigh at their own door he felt a subtle resistance in her whole body; and when, in the hall, he put his arms about her and tried to kiss her, she drew back sharply and said:

"No!—*please!*" Then, as they stood there in the chilly entry, she burst into a passionate explanation: she had been convicted and converted! She had found her Saviour! She—

"There, there, little Tay," he broke in, sadly; "supper is ready, dear." He heard a smothered exclamation—that it was smothered showed how completely she was immersed in a new experience, one of the details of which was the practice of self-control.

But, of course, that night they had it out. . . . When they came into the sitting-room after supper she flung the news into his pale face: *she wished to join the Shakers*. But she must have his consent, she added, impatiently, because otherwise the Shakers would not let her come.

"That's the only thing I don't agree with them about," she said, candidly; "I don't think they ought to make anything so solemn contingent upon the 'consent' of any other human being. But, of course, Lewis, it's only a form. I have left you in spirit, and that is

what counts. So I told them I knew you would consent."

She looked at him with those blue, ecstatic eyes, so oblivious to his pain that for a moment a sort of impersonal amazement at such self-centredness held him silent. But after the first shock he spoke with a slow fluency that pierced Athalia's egotism and stirred an answering astonishment in her. His weeks of vague misgiving, deepening into keen apprehension, had given him protests and arguments which, although they never convinced her, silenced her temporarily. She had never known her husband in this character. Of course, she had been prepared for objections and entreaties, but sound arguments and stern disapproval confused and annoyed her. She had supposed he would tell her she would break his heart; instead, he

said, calmly, that she hadn't the head for Shakerism.

"You've got to be very reasonable, 'Thalia, to stand a community life, or else you've got to be an awful fool. You are neither one nor the other."

"I believe their doctrines," she declared, "and I would die for a religious belief. But I don't suppose you ever felt that you could die for a thing!"

"I think I have—after a fashion," he said, mildly; "but dying for a thing is easy; it's living for it that's hard. You couldn't keep it up, Athalia; you couldn't live for it."

Well, of course, that night was only the beginning. The days and weeks that followed were full of argument, of entreaty, of determination. Perhaps if he had laughed at her. . . . But it is dangerous to laugh at unhumorous people, for if they get angry all is lost.

So he never laughed, nor in all their talks did he ever reproach her for not loving him. Once only his plea was personal—and even then it was only indirectly so.

"Athalia," he said, "there's only one kind of pain in this world that never gets cured. It's the pain that comes when you remember that you've made somebody who loved you unhappy—not for a principle, but for your own pleasure. I know that pain, and I know how it lasts. Once I did something, just to please myself, that hurt mother's feelings. I'd give my right hand if I hadn't done it. It's twenty-two years ago, and I wasn't more than a boy, and she forgave me and forgot all about it. I have never forgotten it. I wish to God I could! 'Thalia, I don't want you to suffer that kind of pain."

She saw the implication rather than the warning, and she burst out, angrily, that she wasn't doing this for "pleasure"; she was doing it for principle! It was for the salvation of her soul!

"Athalia," he said, solemnly, "the salvation of our souls depends on doing our duty."

"Ah!" she broke in, triumphantly, "out of your own lips:—isn't it my duty to do what seems to me right?"

He considered a minute. "Well, yes; I suppose the most valuable example any one can set is to do what he or she believes to be right. It may be wrong, but that is not the point. We must do what we conceive to be our duty. Only, we've got to be sure, Tay, in deciding upon duty, in deciding what is right,—we've got to be sure that self-interest is eliminated. I don't be-

lieve anybody can decide absolutely on what is right without eliminating self."

She frowned at this impatiently; its perfect fairness meant nothing to her.

"You promised to be my wife," he went on with a curious sternness; "it is obviously 'right,' and so it is your first duty to keep your promise—at least, so long as my conduct does not absolve you from it." Then he added, hastily, with careful justice: "Of course, I'm not talking about promises to love; they are nonsense. Nobody can promise to love. Promises to do our duty are all that count."

That was the only reproach he made—if it was a reproach—for his betrayed love. It was just as well. Discussion on this subject between husbands and wives is always futile. Nothing was ever accomplished by it; and yet, in

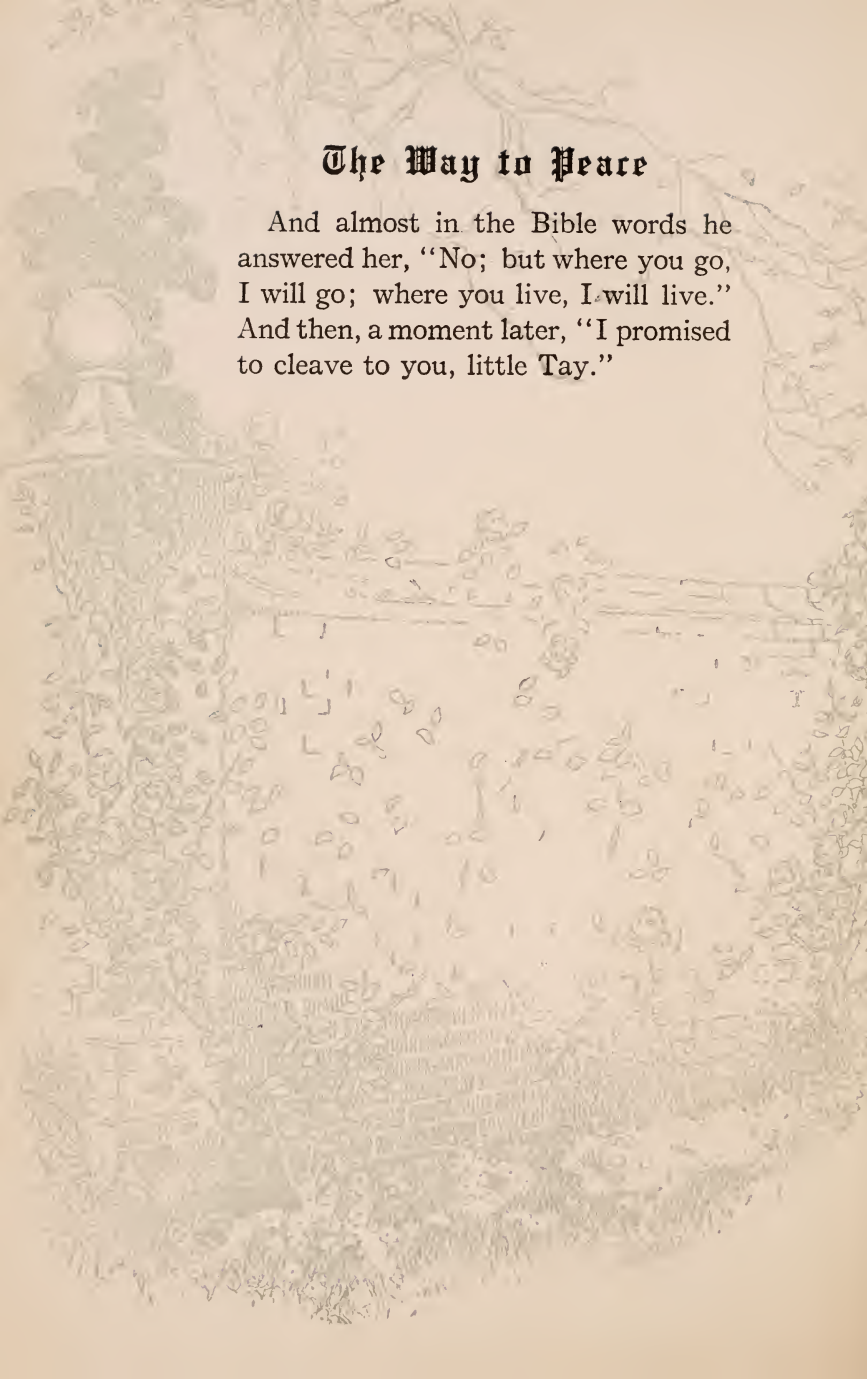
spite of the verdict of time and experience that nothing is gained, over and over the jealous man, and still more frequently the jealous woman, protests against a lost love with a bitterness that kills pity and turns remorse into antagonism. But Lewis Hall made no reproaches. Perhaps Athalia missed them; perhaps, under her spiritual passion, she was piqued that earthly passion was so readily silenced. But, if she was, she did not know it. She was entirely sincere and intensely happy in a new experience. It was a long winter of argument;—and then suddenly, in early April, the break came. . . .

"I *will* go; I have a right to save my soul!"

And he said, very simply, "Well, Athalia, then I'll go, too."

"You? But you don't believe—"

And almost in the Bible words he answered her, "No; but where you go, I will go; where you live, I will live." And then, a moment later, "I promised to cleave to you, little Tay."



II

THE uprooting of their life took a surprisingly short time. In all those dark months of argument Lewis Hall had been quietly making plans for this final step, and such preparation betrayed his knowledge from the first of the hopelessness of his struggle—indeed, the struggle had only been loyalty to a lost cause. His calm assent to his wife's ultimatum left her a little blank; but in the immediate excitement of removal, in the thrill of martyrdom that came with publicity, the blankness did not last. What the publicity was to her husband she could not understand. He received the protests of his family

in stolid silence; when the venturesome great-aunt told him what she thought of him, he smiled; when his brother informed him that he was a fool, he said he shouldn't wonder. When the minister, egged on by distracted Hall relatives, remonstrated, he replied, respectfully, that he was doing what he believed to be his duty, "and if it seems to be a duty, I can't help myself; you see that, don't you?" he said, anxiously. But that was practically all he found to say; for the most part he was silent. Athalia, in her absorption, probably had not the slightest idea of the agonies of mortification which he suffered; her imagination told her, truly enough, what angry relatives and pleasantly horrified neighbors said about her, and the abuse exhilarated her very much; but her imagination stopped there. It did not give her the

family's opinion of her husband; it did not whisper the gossip of the grocery-store and the post-office; it did not repeat the chuckles or echo the innuendoes:

"So Squire Hall's wife's got tired of him? Rather live with the Shakers than him!"

"I like Hall, but I haven't any sympathy with him," the doctor said; "what in thunder did he let her go gallivanting off to visit the Shakers for? Might have known a female like Mrs. Hall 'd get a bee in her bonnet. He ought to have kept her at home. *I* would have. I wouldn't have had any such nonsense in my family! Well, for an obstinate man (and he *is* obstinate, you know), the squire, when it comes to his wife, has no more backbone than a wet string."

"Wonder if there's anything under

it all?" came the sly insinuation of gossip; "wonder if she hasn't got something besides the Shakers up her sleeve? You wait!"

If Athalia's imagination spared her these comments, Lewis's unimaginative common sense supplied them. He knew what other men and husbands were saying about him; what servants and gossip and friends insinuated to one another, and set his jaw in silence. He made no excuse and no explanation. Why should he? The facts spoke. His wife did prefer the Shakers to her husband and her home. To have interfered with her purpose by any plea of his personal unhappiness, or by any threat of an appeal to law, or even by refusing to give the "consent" essential to her admission, would not have altered these facts. As for his reasons for going with her, they would not have

enhanced his dignity in the eyes of the men who wouldn't have had any such nonsense in their families: he must be near her to see that she did not suffer too much hardship, and to bring her home when she was ready to come.

In those days of tearing his life up by the roots the silent man was just a little more silent, that was all. But the fact was burning into his consciousness: he couldn't keep his wife! That was what they said, and that was the truth. It seemed to him as if his soul blushed at his helplessness. But his face was perfectly stolid. He told Athalia, passively, that he had rented the house and mill to Henry Davis; that he had settled half his capital upon her, so that she would have some money to put into the common treasury of the community; then he added

that he had taken a house for himself near the settlement, and that he would hire out to the Shakers when they were haying, or do any farm-work that he could get.

"I can take care of myself, I guess," he said; "I used to camp out when I was a boy, and I can cook pretty well, mother always said." He looked at her wistfully; but the uncomfortableness of such an arrangement did not strike her. In her desire for a new emotion, her eagerness to *feel*—that eagerness which is really a sensuality of the mind—she was too absorbed in her own self-chosen hardships to think of his; which were not entirely self-chosen.

"I think I can find enough to do," he said; "the Shakers need an able-bodied man; they only have those three old men."

"How do you know that?" she asked, quickly.

"I've been to see them twice this winter," he said.

"Why!" she said, amazed, "you never told me!"

"I don't tell you everything nowadays, 'Thalia," he said, briefly.

In those two visits to the Shakers, Lewis Hall had been treated with great delicacy; there had been no effort to proselytize, and equally there had been no triumphing over the accession of his wife; in fact, Athalia was hardly referred to, except when they told him that they would take good care of her, and when Brother Nathan volunteered a brief summary of Shaker doctrines—"so as you can feel easy about her," he explained: "We believe that Christ was the male principle in Deity, and Mother Ann was the female principle.

And we believe in confession of our sins, and in communion with the dead —spiritualism, they call it nowadays— and in the virgin life. Shakers don't marry, nor give in marriage. And we have all things in common. That's all, friend. You see, we don't teach anything that Christ didn't teach, so she won't learn any evil from us. Simple, ain't it?"

"Well, yes, after a fashion," Lewis Hall said; "but it isn't human."

And Brother Nathan smiled mystically. "Maybe that isn't against it, in the long run," he said.

They came to the community in the spring twilight. The brothers and sisters had assembled to meet the convert, and to give a neighborly hand to the silent man who was to live by himself in a little, gray, shingled house

down on Lonely Lake Road. It was a supreme moment to Athalia. She had expected an intense parting from her husband when they left their own house; and she was ready to press into her soul the poignant thorn of grief, not only because it would make her *feel*, but because it would emphasize in her own mind the divine self-sacrifice which she wanted to believe she was making. But when the moment came to close the door of the old home behind them, her husband was cruelly commonplace about it—for poor Lewis had no more drama in him than a kindly Newfoundland dog! He was full of practical cares for his tenant, and he stopped even while he was turning the key in the lock, to "fuss," as Athalia said, over some last details of the transfer of the sawmill. Athalia could not tear herself from arms that placidly

consented to her withdrawal; so there had been no rending ecstasies. In consequence, on the journey up to the community she was a little morose, a little irritable even, just as the drunkard is apt to be irritable when sobriety is unescapable. . . . But at the door of the Family House she had her opportunity: she said, dramatically, "Good-night—*Brother Lewis*." It was an entirely sincere moment. Dramatic natures are not often insincere, they are only unreal.

As for her husband, he said, calmly, "Good-night, dear," and trudged off in the cool May dusk down Lonely Lake Road. He found the door of the house on the latch, and a little fire glowing in the stove; Brother Nathan had seen to that, and had left some food on the table for him. But in spite of the old man's friendly foresight the house

had all the desolation of confusion; in the kitchen there were two or three cases of books, broken open but not unpacked, a trunk and a carpet-bag, and some bundles of groceries; they had been left by the expressman on tables and chairs and on the floor, so that the solitary man had to do some lifting and unpacking before he could sit down in his loneliness to eat the supper Brother Nathan had provided. He looked about to see where he would put up shelves for his books, and as he did so the remembrance of his quiet, shabby old study came to him, almost like a blow.

"Well," he said to himself, "this won't be for so very long. We'll be back again in a year, I guess. Poor little Tay! I shouldn't wonder if it was six months. I wonder, can I buy

Henry Davis off, if she wants to go back in six months?"

And yet, in spite of his calm understanding of the situation, the wound burned. As he went about putting things into some semblance of order, he paused once and looked hard into the fire. . . . When she did want to go back—let it be in six months or six weeks or six days—would things be the same? Something had been done to the very structure and fabric of their life. "Can it ever be the same?" he said to himself; and then he passed his hand over his eyes, in a bewildered way—"Will I be the same?" he said.

III

SUMMER at the Shaker settlement, lying in the green cup of the hills, was very beautiful. The yellow houses along the grassy street drowsed in the sunshine, and when the wind stirred the maple leaves one could see the distant sparkle of the lake. Athalia had a fancy, in the warm twilights, for walking down Lonely Lake Road, that jolted over logs and across gullies and stopped abruptly at the water's edge. She had to pass Lewis's house on the way, and if he saw her he would call out to her, cheerfully,

"Hullo, 'Thalia! how are you, dear?"

And she, with prim intensity, would

reply, "Good-evening, *Brother* Lewis."

If one of the sisters was with her, they would stop and speak to him; otherwise she passed him by in such an eager consciousness of her part that he smiled—and then sighed. When she had a companion, Lewis and the other Shakeress would gossip about the weather or the haying, and Lewis would have the chance to say: "You're not overworking, 'Thalia? You're not tired?" While Athalia, in her net cap and her gray shoulder cape buttoned close up to her chin, would dismiss the anxious affection with a peremptory "Of course not! I have bread to eat you know not of, Brother Lewis." Then she would add, didactically, some word of dogma or admonition.

But she had not much time to give to Brother Lewis's salvation—she was

so busy in adjusting herself to her new life. Its picturesque details fascinated her—the cap, the brevity of speech, the small mannerisms, the occasional and very reserved mysticism, absorbed her so that she thought very little of her husband. She saw him occasionally on those walks down to the lake, or when, after a day in the fields with the three old Shaker men, Brother Nathan brought him home to supper.

"We Shakers are given to hospitality," he said; "we're always looking for the angel we are going to entertain unawares. Come along home with us, Lewis." And Lewis would plod up the hill and take his turn at the tin wash-basin, and then file down the men's side of the stairs to the dining-room, where he and the three old brothers sat at one table, and Athalia and the eight sisters sat at the other table. After supper

he had the chance to see Athalia and to make sure that she was not looking tired. "You didn't take cold yesterday, 'Thalia? I saw you were out in the rain," he would say. And she, always a little embarrassed at such personal interest, would reply, primly, "I am not at all tired, Brother Lewis." Nathan used to walk home with his guest, and sometimes they talked of work that must be done, and sometimes touched on more unpractical things—those spiritual manifestations which at rare intervals centred in Brother William and were the hope of the whole community. For who could tell when the old man's incoherent muttering would break into the clear speech of one of those Heavenly Visitants who, in the early days, had descended upon the Shakers, and then, for some divine and deeply mysterious reason, with-

drawn from such pure channels of communication, and manifested themselves in the world,—but through base and sordid natures. Poor, vague Brother William, who saw visions and dreamed dreams, was, in this community, the torch that held a smouldering spark of the divine fire, and when, in a cataleptic state, his faint intelligence fluttered back into some dim depths of personality, and he moaned and muttered, using awful names with babbling freedom, Brother Nathan and the rest listened with pathetic eagerness for a "*thus saith the Lord*," which should enflame the gray embers of Shakerism and give light to the whole world! When Nathan talked of these things he would add, with a sigh, that he hoped some day William would be inspired to tell them something more of Sister Lydia: "Once William said,

'Coming, coming.' *I* think it meant Lydia; but Eldress thought it was Athalia; it was just before she came." Brother Nathan sighed. "I wish it had meant Lydy," he said, simply.

If Lewis wished it had meant Lydy, he did not say so. And, indeed, he said very little upon any subject; Brother Nathan did most of the talking.

"I fled from the City of Destruction when I was thirty," he told Lewis; "that was just a year before Sister Lydy left us. Poor Lydy! poor Lydy!" he said. "Oh, yee, *I* know the world. I know it, my boy! Do you?"

"Why, after a fashion," Lewis said; and then he asked, suddenly, "Why did you turn Shaker, Nathan?"

"Well, I got hold of a Shaker book that set me thinking. Sister Lydia gave it to me. I met Sister Lydia

when she had come down to the place I lived to sell baskets. And she was interested in my salvation, and gave me the book. Then I got to figuring out the Prophecies, and I saw Shakerism fulfilled them; and then I began to see that when you don't own anything yourself you can't worry about your property; well, that clinched me, I guess. Poor Sister Lydia, she didn't abide in grace herself," he ended, sadly.

"I should have thought you would have been sorry then, that you—" Lewis began, but checked himself. "How about"—he said, and stopped to clear his voice, which broke huskily; —"how about love between man and woman? Husband and wife?"

"Marriage is honorable," Brother Nathan conceded; "Shakers don't despise marriage. But they like to

see folks grow out of it into something better, like—like your wife, maybe."

"Well, your doctrine would put an end to the world," Lewis said, smiling.

"I guess," said Brother Nathan, dryly, "there ain't any immediate danger of the world coming to an end."

"I'd like to see that book," Lewis said, when they parted at the pasture-bars where a foot-path led down the hill to his own house.

And that night Brother Nathan had an eager word for the family. "He's asked for a book!" he said. The Eldress smiled doubtfully, but Athalia, with a rapturous upward look, said, "May the Lord guide him!" then added, practically, "It won't amount to anything. He thinks Shakerism isn't human."

"That's not against it, that's not

against it!" Nathan declared, smiling; "I've told him so a dozen times!"

But Athalia was so happy that first year, and so important, that she did not often concern herself with the welfare of the man who had been her husband. Instead—it was early in April—he concerned himself with hers; he tried, tentatively, to see if it wasn't almost time for Athalia "to get through with it." Of course, afterward, Sister Athalia realized, with chagrin, that this attempt was only a forerunner of the fever that was developing, which in a few days was to make him a very sick man. But for the moment his question seemed to her a temptation of the devil, and, of course, resisted temptation made her faith stronger than ever.

It was a deliciously cold spring night; Lewis had drawn the table, with his

books on it, close to the fire to try to keep warm, but he shivered, even while his shoulders scorched, and somehow he could not keep his mind on the black, rectangular characters of the Hebrew page before him. He had been interested in Brother Nathan's explanation of Hosea's forecasting of Shakerism, and he had admitted to himself that, if Nathan was correct, there would be something to be said for Shakerism. The idea made him vaguely uneasy, because, that "something" might be so conclusive, that—But he could not face such a possibility.

He wanted to dig at the text, so that he might refute Nathan; but somehow that night he was too dull to refute anybody, and by-and-by he pushed the black-lettered page aside, and, crouching over the fire, held out his hands to the blaze. He thought,

SUDDENLY, IN THE CHILLY NUMBNESS OF HIS MIND, HE SAW IT

vaguely, of the big fireplace in the old study, and suddenly, in the chilly numbness of his mind, he saw it—with such distinctness that he was startled. Then, a moment later, it changed into the south chamber that had been his mother's bedroom—he could even detect the faint scent of rose-geranium that always hung about her; he noticed that the green shutters on the west windows were bowed, and from between them a line of sunshine fell across the matting on the floor and touched the four-poster that had a chintz spread and valance. How well he knew the faded roses and the cockatoos on that old chintz! Over there by the window he had caught her crying that time he had hurt her feelings, "just for his own pleasure"; the old stab of this thought pierced through the feverish mists and touched the quick. He struggled

numbly with the visualization of fever, brushing his hot hand across his eyes and trying to see which was real—the geranium-sweet south chamber or the chilly house on Lonely Lake Road. Athalia had given him pain in that same way—just for her own pleasure. Poor little Tay! He was afraid it would hurt her, some day, when she realized it; well, when she came to herself, when she got through her playing at Shakerism, he must not let her know how great the pain had been; she would suffer too much if she should understand his misery: and Athalia didn't bear suffering well. . . . But how long she had been getting over Shakerism! He had thought it would only last six months, and here it was a year! Well, if Nathan's reading of the Prophecies was right, then Athalia would never get over it. She ought

never to get over it. Then what would become of the farm and the sawmill? And instantly everything was unreal again; he could hear the hum of the driving-wheel and the screech of the saw tearing through a log; how fragrant the fresh planks were, and the great heaps of sawdust—but the noise made his head ache; and—and the fire didn't seem hot. . . .

It was in one of those moments when the mists thinned, and he knew that he was shivering over the stove instead of basking in the sunshine in his mother's room that smelled of rose-geranium leaves, that Athalia came in. She looked conscious and confused, full of a delightful embarrassment at being for once alone with him. The color was deep on her cheeks, and her eyes were starry.

"Eldress asked me to bring your

mail down to you, Brother Lewis," she said.

"Thalia!" he said; "I am so glad to see you, dear; I—I seem to be rather used up, somehow." The mists had quite cleared away, but a violent headache made his words stumble. "I was just wondering, Thalia—don't you think you might go home now? You've had a whole year of it—and I really ought to go home—the mill—"

"Why, Lewis Hall! What do you mean!" she said, forgetting her part in her indignation. "I am a Shakeress. You've no right to speak so to me."

He blinked at her through the blur of pain. "I wish you'd stay with me, Athalia, I've got a—a sort of—headache. Never mind about being a Shakeress just for to-night. It would be such a comfort to have you."

But Athalia, with a horrified look,

had left him. She fled home in the darkness with burning cheeks; she debated with herself whether she should tell Eldress how her husband — no, Brother Lewis—had tried to "tempt" her back to him. In her excitement at this lure of the devil she even wondered whether Lewis had pretended that he was ill, to induce her to stay with him? But even Athalia's imagination could not compass such a thought of Lewis for more than a moment, so she only told the Eldress that Brother Lewis had "tried to persuade her to go back to the world with him." The Lord had defended her, she said, excitedly, and she had forbidden him to speak to her!

Eldress Hannah looked perplexed. "That's not like Lewis. I wonder—" But she did not say what she wondered. Instead, she went early in the morn-

ing down Lonely Lake Road to Lewis's house. The poor fellow was entirely in the mists by that time, shivering and burning and quite unconscious, saying over and over, "She wouldn't stay; she wouldn't stay."

"'Lure her back,'" said Eldress Hannah, with a snort. "Poor boy! It's good riddance for him."

But Eldress Hannah stayed, and Brother Nathan joined her, and for many days the little community was shaken with real anxiety, for they had all come to love the solitary, waiting husband. Athalia, abashed, but still cherishing the dear insult of having been tempted, took what little part Eldress allowed her in the care of the sick man; but in the six or seven weeks of his illness Brother Nathan and the Eldress were his devoted nurses, and by-and-by a genuine friendship grew

up between them. Old Eldress Hannah's shrewd good-humor was as wholesome as a sound winter apple, and Nathan had a gayety Lewis had never suspected. The old man grew very confidential in those days of Lewis's convalescence; he showed his simple heart with a generosity that made the sick man's lip tighten once or twice and his eyes blur;—Lewis came to know all about Sister Lydia; indeed, he knew more than the old man knew himself. When the invalid grew stronger, Nathan wrestled with him over the Prophecies, and Lewis studied them and the other foundation-stones of the Shaker faith with a constantly increasing anxiety. "Because," he said, with a nervous blink, "if you *are* right—" But he left the sentence unfinished. Once he said, with a feeble passion—for he was still very weak—"I tell you,

Nathan, it isn't human!" and then added, under his breath, "but God knows whether that's not in its favor."

When he was quite well again he was plainly preoccupied. He pored over the Prophecies with a concentration that made him blind even to Athalia's tired looks. Once, when some one said in his presence, "Sister 'Thalia is working too hard," he blinked at her in an absent way before the old, anxious attention awoke in his eyes.

Athalia tossed her head and said, "Brother Lewis has his own affairs to think of, I guess!"

And he said, eagerly: "Yes, 'Thalia; I have been thinking— Some day I'll tell you. But not yet."

"Oh, I haven't time to pry into other people's thoughts," she said, acidly. And, indeed, just then her time was

very full. She was enormously useful to the community that second winter; her young power and strength shone out against the growing weariness of the old sisters. "Athalia's capable," Eldress Hannah said, and the other sisters said "Yee," and smiled at one another.

"She *is* useful," Sister Jane declared; "do you know, she got through the churning before nine? I'd 'a' been at it until eleven!"

"Athalia is like one of those candles that have a streak of soft wax in 'em," Eldress Hannah murmured; "but she's useful, as you say, Jane."

In January, when the Eldress fell ill, Athalia was especially useful. She nursed her with a passion of faithfulness that made the other sisters remonstrate.

"You'll wear yourself out, Athalia;

you haven't had your clothes off for three days and nights!"

"The Lord has upheld me, and His right hand has sustained me," Athalia quoted, with an uplifted look.

"Yee," old Jane assented, "but He likes sense, Athalia, and there ain't any reason why two of us shouldn't take turns settin' up with her to-night."

"This is my service," Athalia said, smiling joyously.

Eldress Hannah, lying with closed eyes, said, suddenly: "Athalia, don't be foolish and conceited. You go right along to your bed; Jane and Mary 'll look after me."

It took Athalia a perceptible minute to get herself in hand sufficiently to say, meekly, "Yee, Eldress." When she had shut the door behind her with perhaps something more than Shaker em-

phasis, the Eldress opened her eyes and smiled at old Jane. "She's smart," she said.

"Yee," said Sister Jane; and there was a little chuckle.

The sick woman closed her eyes again and sighed. "What a nurse Lydia was!" she said; and added, suddenly: "How is Nathan getting along with Lewis? There isn't much more time, I guess," she ended, mildly; "she won't last it out another summer."

"She's done better than I expected, to stay till now," Jane said; and the Eldress nodded.

But it was, perhaps, a natural result of Athalia's abounding energy that toward the end of that second winter in the Shaker village she should grow irritable. The spring work was very heavy that year. Brother William was too feeble to do even the light,

pottering tasks that had been allotted to him, and his vague babblings about the spirits ceased altogether. In April old Jane died, and that put extra burdens on Athalia's capable shoulders. "But I notice I don't get anything extra for my work, not even thanks!" she told Lewis, sharply, and forgot to call him "Brother." She had walked down Lonely Lake Road and stopped at his gate. She looked thinner; her forget-me-not eyes were clouded, and there was an impatient line about her lips, instead of the faint, ecstatic smile which was part of her early experience.

"Yes, there's lots of work to be done," he agreed, "but when people do it together—"

"What do you think?"—she interrupted him, her lip drooping a little in a half-contemptuous smile—"they've heard again from that Sister Lydia who

ran away! You know who I mean? —Brother Nathan is always talking about her. They think she'll come back. *I* should say good riddance! Though of course if it's genuine repentance I'll be glad. Only I don't think it is."

"How pleased Nathan will be!" Lewis said.

"Oh, he's pleased; he's rather too pleased for a Shaker, it strikes me."

Lewis frowned. "There is joy in the presence of the angels," he reminded her, gravely.

"Angels!" she said, with a laugh; "I don't believe so much in the angels as I did before I knew so much about them. I understand that when this 'angel' comes back I am to give up my room to her, if you please, because it used to be hers. Oh, I'm of no importance now— Lewis," she broke off,

suddenly, "who has our house this year?"

"Davis; he wants to re-lease it in May."

"He just takes it by the year, doesn't he?" she asked.

He nodded. "Wants a five-years' lease next time."

"Well, don't give it to him!" she said; and added, frowning: "You ought to go back yourself, you know. It's foolish for you to be here. Why, it's almost two years!"

"Time flies," he said, smiling.

She laughed and sighed. "Yes—I mean yee—indeed, it does! I was just thinking, Lewis, we've been married ten years!"

"No, eight years. We were married just eight years," he said, soberly.

The color flew into her face. "Oh,

yee; we were married eight years when I came in."

He looked at her with great tenderness. "Athalia, I have to confess to you that when you came I didn't think it would last with you. I distrusted the Holy Spirit. And I came, myself, against my will, as you know. But now I begin to think you were led—and perhaps you have led me."

Athalia gave a little gasp—"*What!*"

"I am not sure yet," he said.

"You said Shakerism was unhuman!" Athalia protested, with a thrill of panic in her voice.

"Ah!" he cried, his face suddenly kindling, "you know what Nathan is always saying?—'That's not against it'? Athalia, its unhumanness, as you call it, is why I think it may be of God. The human in us must give way to the divine. 'First that which

is natural; then that which is spiritual.'"

"I — don't understand," she said, faintly; "you are not a Shaker?"

"No," he said, "not yet. But perhaps some day—I am trying to follow you, Athalia."

She caught her breath with a frightened look. "Follow—*me?*" Then she burst out crying.

"Why, Tay!" he said, bewildered; "what is it, dear?" But she had left him, stumbling blindly as she walked, her face hidden in her hands.

Lewis went back into his house, and, lighting his lamp, sat down to pore over one of Brother Nathan's books. He was concerned, but he smiled a little; it was so like Athalia to cry when she was happy! He did not see his wife for several days. The Eldress said Sister 'Thalia was not well, and

Lewis looked sorry, but made no comment. He was a little anxious, but he did not dwell upon his anxiety. In the next few days he worked hard all day in Brother Nathan's herb-house, where the air was hazy with the aromatic dust of tansy and pennyroyal, then hurried home at night to sit down to his books, so profoundly absorbed in them that sometimes he only knew that it was time to sleep because the dawn fell white across the black-lettered page.

But one night, a week later, when he came home from work, he did not open his Bible; he stood a long time in his doorway, looking at the sunset, and, as he looked, his face seemed to shine with some inner light. The lake was like glass; high in the upper heavens thin golden lines of cloud had turned to rippling copper; the sky behind the

black circle of the hills was a clear, pale green, and in the growing dusk the water whitened like snow. "'Glass mingled with fire,'" he murmured to himself; "yes, 'great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints!'" And what more marvellous work than this wonder of his own salvation? Brought here against his will, against his judgment! How he had struggled against the Spirit. He was humbled to the earth at the remembrance of it; "if I had my way, we wouldn't have walked up the hill from the station that morning!" . . .

The flushing heavens faded into ashes, but the solemn glow of half-astonished gratitude lingered on his face.

"Lewis," some one said in the darkness of the lane — "*Lewis!*" Athalia came up the path swiftly and put her

hands on his arm. "Lewis, I—I want to go home." She sobbed as she spoke.

He started as if she had struck him.

"Lewis, Lewis, let us go home!"

The flame of mystical satisfaction went out of his face as a lighted candle goes out in the wind.

"There isn't any home now, Athalia," he said, with a sombre look; "there's only a house. Come in," he added, heavily; "we must talk this out."

She followed him, and for a moment they neither of them spoke; he fumbled about in the warm darkness for a match, and lifting the shade, lighted the lamp on the table; then he looked at her. "Athalia," he said, in a terrified voice, "I am—*I am a Shaker!*"

"No—no—no!" she said. She grew very white, and sat down, breathing quickly. Then the color came back

faintly into her lips. "Don't say it, Lewis; it isn't true. It can't be true!"

"It is true," he said, with a groan. He had sunk into a chair, and his face was hidden in his hands. "What are we going to do?" he said, hoarsely.

"Why, you mustn't be!" she cried; "you can't be—that's all. You can't *stay* if I go!"

"I must stay," he said.

There was a stunned silence. Then she said, in an amazed whisper:

"What! You don't love me any more?"

Still he was silent.

"You—don't—love—me," she said, as if repeating some astounding fact, which she could not yet believe.

He seemed to gather his courage up.

"I have—" he tried to speak; faltered, broke, went on: "I have—the

"DON'T SAY IT, LEWIS!"

kindliest feelings toward you, 'Thalia"—his last word was in a whisper.

"Stop!" she protested, with a frightened look — "oh, stop! — don't say *that!*" He did not speak; and suddenly, looking at his fixed face, she cried out, violently: "Oh, why, why did I go up to the graveyard that day? Why did you let me?" She stared at him, her forget-me-not eyes dilating with dismay. "It all came from that. If we hadn't walked up the hill that morning—" He was speechless. Then, abruptly, she sprang to her feet, and, running to him, knelt beside him and tried to pull down the hands in which he had again hidden his face. "Lewis, it's I—Tay! You don't 'feel kindly' to *me?* Lewis, you haven't stopped loving me?"

"I am a Shaker," he said, helplessly.

"I can't give up my religion, even for you."

He got on his feet and stood before her, his empty palms hanging at his sides in that strange gesture of entire hopelessness; he tried to speak, but no words came. The lamp on the table flickered a little. Their shadows loomed gigantic on the wall behind them; the little hot room was very still.

"You think you don't love me?" Athalia said, between set teeth; "*I know better!*" With a laugh she caught his arm with both her shaking hands, and kissed him once, and then again. Still he was silent. Then with a cry she threw herself against his breast. "I love you," she said, passionately, "and you love me! Nothing on earth will make me believe you don't love me,"—and for one vital moment her lips burned against his.

His arms did not close about her,—but his hands clinched slightly. Then he moved back a step or two, and she heard him sigh. "Don't, sister," he said, gently.

She threw up her hands with a frantic gesture. "*Sister?* My God!" she said; and left him.

* * *

There was no further struggle between them. A week later she went away. As he told her, "the house was there"—and to that she went until she could make up her mind just where she should go to find some whirl of life that would make her deaf to voices of the past.

As for Lewis, he did not see that miserable departure from the Family House in the shabby old carryall that had been the Shakers' one vehicle for

more than thirty years. He told Nathan he wanted to mow the burial-ground up on the hill that morning. From that high and silent spot he could see the long white road up from the settlement on one side and down to the covered bridge on the other side. He sat under the pine-tree, his scythe against the stone wall behind him, his clinched hands between his knees. Sitting thus, he watched the road and the slow crawl of the shaky old carriage. . . . After it had passed the burying-ground and was out of sight, he hid his face in his bent elbow.

It was some ten years afterward that word came to Eldress Hannah that Athalia Hall was dying and wanted to see her husband; would he come to her?

"Will you go, Brother Lewis?" Eldress asked him, doubtfully.

"Yee, if you think best," he said.

"I do think best," the old woman said.

He went, a bent, elderly man in a gray coat, threading his wavering way through the noisy buffet of the streets of the city where Athalia had elected to dwell. He found her in a gaudy hotel, full of the glare of pushing, hurrying life. He sat down at her bedside, a little breathless, and looked at her with mild, remote eyes.

"Do you forgive me, Lewis?" she said.

"I have nothing to forgive, sister," he told her.

"Don't call me that!" she cried, with feeble passion.

He looked a little bewildered. "Yee," he said, "I forgive you."

"Oh, Lewis! — Lewis! — Lewis!" she mourned; "this is what I have

done!" She wept pitifully. His face grew vaguely troubled, as if he did not quite understand. . . . Then, abruptly, the veil lifted: his eyes dilated with pain; he passed his hand over his forehead once or twice and sighed. Then he looked down at the poor, dying face that once he had loved.

"Why, 'Thalia!" he said, in a surprised and anguished voice; suddenly he put his arm under the restless head. "There, there, little Tay; don't cry," he said, and smiled at her.

And with that she was content to fall asleep.

THE END

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E. P. L. Bindery,
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